

MSM-PSM

If you did not submit written testimony *at least 24 hours* before today's hearing and would like to testify, please sign-up on this sheet.

BILL NO: SB 913

[illegible]

TESTIMONY ON SB 913 RELATING PUBLIC SAFETY,  
INCARCERATED PARENTS DATA

LATE

February 26, 2015

1:30 pm

Conference Rm. 016

Aloha,

My name is Malia Peters. I am a parent of a child whose father was incarcerated eighteen years ago. I strongly support SB 913 Relating to Public Safety, Incarcerated Parent Data.

Eighteen years ago my life was forever changed when my husband (now ex-husband) committed a horrible crime sentencing him to a 20 year prison sentence, which left my three-year-old son and I suddenly in a very difficult situation. While we understood the severity of his crime and prison sentence, we've had a long and challenging road ever since. Helping families of prisoners who are left behind has become a passion in my life, encouraging them that they too can overcome these tough situations. My testimony is simply because I would like to make the road less rough, so that our state and society can have a better chance of decreasing the cycle of incarceration.

While there are various estimates of the number of children nationwide who have at least one parent that is incarcerated (over 2 million), we have no idea in our State of Hawaii, of any number of children that are affected. Studies have also shown that in terms of negative impacts on children, incarceration may be worse than the death of a parent or the divorce of parents. When a parent passes away or when parents divorce, families receive a lot of sympathy, love, compassion, and financial support. In Hawaii, to get a divorce families are required to attend "Kids First", a program to help families survive divorce. However, when a parent is sentenced to prison, there is no "program" or "class" to attend, and very often there is no sympathy. Many family members witnessed or were the victim of the crime, and there is often no emotional or financial assistance for families. The surviving spouse, significant other, or grandparent is often the sole provider putting physical, emotional, mental, and financial strain on families.

Something more concerning is the evidence that children who have a parent in prison are more likely to become incarcerated themselves as teenagers or adults, thus continuing the "cycle of incarceration" that sadly becomes generational in some families.

Having been through this personally, I wish I could be there in person to share with you first hand how difficult this experience was for my son and I. I never wanted to ask for help for fear that I would minimize the horrible crime that my husband had committed and offend the victim and their family. I also didn't ask for help because I was embarrassed to share why my husband was incarcerated. I was afraid what he did would be a reflection of me and my own character. When I became desperate enough to seek assistance, I didn't know where to turn, and when I did try to apply for various types of assistance we didn't qualify because I was working. My single income however was not sustainable to support my son and I, which forced me to take a second job. My son now lost both his parents, became mute, and we had no medical coverage to get him the emotional support he needed. It was a horrible thing to go through and it is only

by the grace of God, the family I was blessed with, that I am able to stand strong today, with my son grown and by my side, sharing my story with each of you. It's taken me years to talk about this but I am realizing that this may be my purpose in life...to make a difference for others who are going through the same thing.

I recently joined the Hawaii Prisoners Resource Center, dba Holomua Center, who has established a working group to explore the issues surrounding children and families impacted by incarceration. We are called the Family Reunification Working Group (FRWG), the group is comprised of representatives from several organizations and service providers who want to support this population.

Having data/statistics illustrating the number of children affected by incarceration is critical for so many reasons. At the very least, we need to know as a state and as a society, how many children (especially children under the age of 18) are affected. We need to understand who the caregivers are for these children in the parents' absence. This information is important to understand the magnitude of what we think is a concerning issue (is it as bad as we think)? Finally, we need data to enable our state and various organizations to submit for grants that can provide various types of support (physical, emotional, educational, financial) to families who are specifically affected by incarceration.

Some have argued/commented that prisoners won't be truthful on the intake form and won't voluntarily provide this information for fear they will be penalized for child support, or for fear that their children will be taken away from them. I disagree, and feel strongly, that if they fully understood the reason for these questions, and that their family may qualify for help, that they would cooperate and provide the information. I remember my husband feeling helpless and frustrated knowing the hardship we were going through because of his careless acts, which lead to bad behavior behind bars. Participating in answering these questions would be a small thing a prisoner with a family could do while behind bars to improve the circumstances their family is in.

Without this type of basic information, it is very difficult to advocate and seek assistance and opportunities for this unique population. Our state needs help taking care of these children and these families that are affected. We need to reduce the cycle of incarceration and we should do whatever we can to make seeking outside funding opportunities possible.

Mahalo nui to each of you for your service, and for your consideration of this letter of support.

With much aloha and blessings,

Malia Peters

LATE

Testimony Submitted to the  
Committee on Human Services and Housing  
And the Committee on Public Safety, Intergovernmental and Military  
**In Support** of SB913, Relating to Public Safety  
Thursday, February 26, 2015  
1:30 p.m.  
Conference Room 016

Aloha Chair Oakland, Chair Espero, Vice Chair Green, Vice Chair Baker and Members of the  
Committees,

Mahalo nui loa for the opportunity to testify on this important measure. My name is Kehaulani Lum, and I am the President of the Ali'i Pauahi Hawaiian Civic Club and the Secretary of the Living Life Source Foundation. Both of these organizations are deeply committed to the well-being of Native Hawaiian youth and families, with a particular concern for those who are homeless and in need of support.

**I strongly support** SB913 and ask for your serious consideration.

SB913 requires the department of public safety to collect data relating to the number of incoming offenders into the state correctional system who are parents and the number of children they have that are under the age of eighteen.

This information is critical to ensuring that the children of incoming offenders receive the economic, educational, social and healing support that they need to overcome the challenges that their families face.

A growing body of national research demonstrates that children whose parents are sent to jail may experience great trauma, as a result of their parents' incarceration. This bill takes a long-awaited first step towards identifying and addressing the unique needs of Hawai'i's keiki with incarcerated parents, by authorizing the Department of Public Safety (DPS) to collect intake data relating to parents in prison and their children. This bill would require DPS, through its prisoner intake centers, to collect or coordinate the collection of data on the number of parents entering the prison system, the number of children of such parents, and any other information the department may find useful in facilitating services to meet these keiki's needs.

Please take this important first step to help our keiki and families heal.

Mahalo nui loa.